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**XIX.—Explorations in Jarvis Inlet and Desolation Sound,
British Columbia. By Mr. W. DOWNIE.**

Communicated by Sir EDWARD BULWER LYTTON, Bart., F.R.G.S., &c., H. M.'s
Secretary for the Colonies.

Read, December 12, 1859.

Mr. WILLIAM DOWNIE to GOVERNOR JAMES DOUGLAS.

SIR,

Victoria, Vancouver Island, March 19th, 1859.

I have the honour to inform your Excellency of my return to Victoria, after a sojourn of sixteen weeks in British Columbia.

I have been for the last month in Desolation Sound. The snow and rain set in, so as to make it impossible to start over the mountains from the head of Jarvis Inlet to the Upper Fraser River for some time.

I then thought it would be as well to visit the Klahous country, as I had heard a great deal about it.

We started from the head of Jarvis Inlet on the 22nd of February for Desolation Sound, in a small canoe with four Indians, pick, pan, shovel, and rocker; came down the west entrance of Jarvis Inlet, which is much better than the eastern. From Scotch-fir Point, up the coast, it is shallow, and rocks and reefs running out a good distance from the shore.

It was most refreshing to come down on the gulf, where the land had all the appearance of spring, and after being so long up the inlet. No snow on any of islands along the coast except Taxada. Savary Island has all the appearance of a farm under cultivation, from the abundance of grass on it: large patches of farming-land make it look very enticing, but the water is scarce for farming purposes; but there are excellent pastures for stock all the year round. The mainland opposite this island changes in appearance with regard to the rock formation: quartz and slate along the shore up to Sarah Point.

We arrived safe in Desolation Sound, which does certainly look somewhat desolate in a snow-storm, but I am well pleased with the prospect of this section.

This is the first time I have seen pure veins of sulphuret of iron, which looks very much like silver. The first I saw of it was a small square piece in the possession of an Indian: I offered him some tobacco for it, but he would not part with it, even if I gave him its weight in gold. I came across a number of seams of the same kind. It lays in the quartz, the same as gold. I have no idea that the gold is confined to Fraser River alone; and if it can only be found from the seaboard, or on the rivers at the head of some of these inlets, the country will soon be prospected.

Bute Inlet (Homattheo), that runs so much farther north than this inlet, has a large river emptying into it from the north-west. This river looks most favourable for gold, and I should much like to have prospected it; but the Indians would not go, as they were afraid of the Euclitus tribes: the principal reason, however, being that the canoe was small, and we were not altogether prepared to give it a fair trial. It was snowing most of the time, and rather discouraging.

Camped near the Klahous Indian village, they paid me a visit, as a matter of course, and I gave them all a small piece of tobacco. They seemed well pleased; but they would have a look at our mining-tools, canoe, and blankets, and our general appearance. When they had satisfied themselves on these points, they told my Indians I was not a Tyee—meaning a chief, a person of consequence (this was the unkindest cut of all). My Indians told them I was a Tyee; but it was of no use. They said a Tyee would have a large

canoe and plenty of blankets: whereas there was nothing of the kind visible, only picks, pans, and an old rocker,—and what was the use of that among Indians?

I did not feel disposed to find fault with the poor Klahous Indians for judging from outward appearance, and, upon the whole, I got along with them very well. We got a few potatoes from them, so there must be something else besides rocks in Desolation Sound.

We went up to the head of the inlet, where the "Deserted Village" is on the map, but there were no Indians there. It looked as much like a deserted village as it did when it was named by Vancouver. About two miles above this, the river comes in from the north-east. The sand washing out of the river has formed a large flat at the head of the inlet, in some places dry at low-water. We had some difficulty in getting the canoe into the river, which is also shallow, being filled up with sand from the continued wash from the mountains.

We went up the river about five miles. The Indians told me it would take five days to go to the head of it. Judging from the way a canoe goes up such rivers, the distance would be about sixty miles, which must be a long distance above the Squamish, and would not be far from the Lilloet. The Indians have gone this route to the head of Bridge River (Hoystier), which it may prove to be the best route to try. It is very evident there is a pass in the Coast Range here, that will make it preferable to Jarvis Inlet or Howe Sound. If a route can be got through, it will lead direct to Bridge River.

I have seen more black sand here in half a day, than I did in California in nine years: it looks clear and bright as if it came from quartz.*

Seeing that it was out of the question to proceed farther, we put back and came down along shore, breaking and trying the rocks, but did not discover any gold. Lots of iron pyrites or sulphuret of iron.

The land on each side of the river is low, and must be overflowed in many places in spring; but for all that, if a trail can be found through, it will not be difficult to make a road along the banks of the river.

In coming down we passed through what on the map is called the Island "Redonda." This is a fine passage, and shortens the distance about ten miles in going to Klahous Inlet.

The distance from Klahous Inlet to Homattheo Inlet (Bute Inlet on the chart) is about 30 miles; but I could not get the Indians to go in the small canoe.

The Indians told me that the colour of the water in the large river that comes in at the head of Homattheo from the north-west, was the same as Fraser River; and thus when I proceed thither, I should be in or near the range of Queen Charlotte Islands, where I should get gold.

We had a hard passage to Nanaimo; but arrived all right, paid off the Indians, and heard from Captain Stuart that he had forwarded supplies to Jarvis Inlet by order of your Excellency, so that I was all ready for a start again to Desolation Sound, if I could obtain a small decked boat.

Fort St. James, Stuart Lake, New Caledonia,
10th October, 1859.

SIR,

I beg to make the following report of my trip to Queen Charlotte Islands and my journey thence by Fort Simpson to the interior of British Columbia.

Having left Victoria on the 27th July, with twenty-seven practical miners, with stores, &c., for three months, we arrived in Gold Harbour, Queen Charlotte Islands safely, on the 6th August, and immediately set about prospecting.

We examined the spot where a large quantity of gold was formerly taken

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out, and discovered a few specks of it in the small quartz-seams that run through the slate; two of the party blasting the rock, while others prospected round the harbour.

I then proceeded in a canoe to Douglas Inlet, which runs in south of Gold Harbour, hoping to find traces of the Gold Harbour lead, but without success. The nature of the rock is trap or hornblende, with a few poor seams of quartz straggling over the surface. Granite was found at the head of this inlet, but not a speck of gold. Next day we went up an inlet to the north of Gold Harbour, and here a white rock showed itself on the spur of a mountain.

After a difficult ascent we found it to be nothing but weather-beaten, sun-dried granite, instead of quartz. Farther up the inlet we saw a little black slate and some talcose rock, but nothing that looked like gold. On our return, we found that the men engaged in blasting the rock had given it up; the few surface specks being all the gold that could be found.

The large amount of gold that was formerly found with so little difficulty, existed in what is called an offshoot or blow. The question then arises how did the gold get here; some of our party were of opinion that a gold-lead exists close at hand, but it can only be put down to one of the extraordinary freaks of nature so often found in a mineral country.

The offshoots in question are not uncommon, as I have often seen them in California. On such a discovery being made, hundreds of miners would take claims in all directions near it, and test the ground in every way, but nothing farther could be found, except in the one spot, about 70 feet in length, running south-east and north-west; on being worked about 15 feet it gave out. Before work commenced I have blown the sand off a vein of pure gold.

I now proposed to test the island farther, and started for the Skidegate Channel. At a village of the Crosswer Indians, where we were windbound, the appearances were more favourable. Talcose slate, quartz, and red earth were seen. We tried to discover gold, but without success. Sulphuret of iron was found in abundance, and we discovered traces of previous prospectings; the Indians understand the search for gold well, and detect it in the rocks quicker even than I can.

The coast from the Casswer Indian village to Skidegate Channel, is wilder than any I have ever before travelled, and we did not care to hunt for gold in such a place. Five Indians were drowned here to-day, while fishing.

At the Skidegate Channel we found black slate and quartz prevailing; farther north granite appears, and then sandstone and conglomerate; and as we were now in a coal country, it was no use to look for gold.

We saw coal here, but I cannot speak as to its quality, not being a judge of it. The formation is similar to that of Nanaimo. From this we returned to Gold Harbour, where a party which had remained behind to prospect inland had met with no better success than ourselves. We then consulted what was the best thing to do; I did not wish to return to Victoria, as your Excellency had desired me to explore some of the inlets on the mainland, and I left Gold Harbour with a party of fourteen men for Fort Simpson, where we arrived in eight days. The north-west coast of Queen Charlotte Islands is a low sand and gravel flat, having no resemblance to a gold country.

I left Fort Simpson for the Skeena River on the 31st August. From Fort Simpson to Fort Essington is about 40 miles; the salt water here is of a light-blue colour, like the mouth of Fraser River, and runs inland about 30 miles. The coarse-grained quartz of Fort Simpson is no longer seen here, and granite appears; and the banks of the river are low, and covered with small hard wood and cotton-trees, with some good sized white oaks, the first I have seen west of Fraser River.

Vessels drawing upwards of 4 feet of water cannot go more than 20 miles up the Skeena River, and it is very unlike the deep inlets to the southward.

At our camp here some Indians visited us, and told us that they were honest, but next morning the absence of my coat rather negated their statement. Next day we found the river shoal even for loaded canoes, as it had fallen much. At our next camp I went up a small river called Scenatoys, and the Indians showed me some crystallized quartz, and to my surprise a small piece with gold in it, being the first I had seen in this part. The Indian took me to a granite slide whence, as he asserted, the piece of quartz had come. I found some thin crusts of fine quartz, but no gold. From the river Scenatoys to Fort Essington, at the mouth of the Skeena River, is 75 miles; a little below the Scenatoys an Indian trail leads to Fort Simpson, through a low pass, and the distance is not great.

From this, 10 miles farther up was a river called the Toes. On the south side hence is an Indian trail to the Kitloops on the Salmon River, the south branch of Salmon, which river is called Kittama.

By this time we were fairly over the coast range, and the mountains ahead of us did not look very high; the current here was very strong and much labour was required to get our canoe along, and we had to pull her up by a rope from the shore.

Gold is found here, a few specks to the pan, and the whole country looks auriferous, with fine bars and flats with clay on the bars; the mountains look red, and slate and quartz were seen.

The next camp was at the village of Kitalaska, and I started in a light canoe ahead of my party, as our canoe, by all accounts, could not proceed much farther, and I then determined to penetrate to Fort Fraser. The Indian who was with me, told me that a large stream called the Kitchumsala comes in from the north, the land on it is good and well adapted for farming, and that the Indians grow plenty of potatoes. To the south is a small stream called the Chinkoatsh, on the south of which is the Plumbago Mountain, of which I had some in my hand, as clear as polished silver, and runs in veins of quartz.

Near to this on a tree are the words "Pioneer, H. B. C.," and nearly overgrown with bark; the Indian told me it was cut by Mr. John Worth, a long time ago.

From this to the village of Kitcoonsa the land improves, the mountains recede from the river and fine flats run away 4 or 5 miles back to their bases, where the smoke is seen rising from the huts of the Indians engaged in drying berries for the winter. These Indians were very kind to us, and wished me to build a house there, and live with them.

Above the village of Kitcoonsa, the prospect of gold is not so good as below. As the season was so advanced I was not able to prospect the hills which look so well, and unless the Government takes it in hand, it will be a long while before the mineral resources of this part of British Columbia can be known. This is the best-looking mineral country I have seen in British Columbia.

From here to the village of Kitsagatala the river is rocky and dangerous, and our canoe was split from stem to stern.

At Kitsagatala we entered a most extensive coal country, the seams being in sight and cut through by the river, and running up the banks on both sides, varying in thickness from 3 to 35 feet.

The veins are larger on the east side and are covered with soft sandstone, which gives easily to the pick; on the west side quartz lines the seams, which are smaller. The veins dip into the bank for a mile along the river, and could easily be worked by tunnels on the face, or by sinking shafts from behind on the flats, as they run into soft earth.

I have seen no coal like this in all my travels in British Columbia and Vancouver Island.

We experienced some danger from Indians here, but by a small present of tobacco, and by a determined and unconcerned aspect, I succeeded in avoiding

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the danger of a collision with them. We could go no farther in the canoe than Kittamarks or the Forks of the Skeena River, and we had been twenty days from Fort Simpson, though the journey could have been done in a third of that time.

On the 21st September I left Kittamarks with two white men and two Indians, and started over a fine trail through a beautiful country for Fort Fraser. We crossed over an Indian suspension-bridge and entered some first-rate land, our course being about east; we completed about 12 miles to-day. Next day it rained hard, but we succeeded in doing 12 miles again, passing through as fine a farming country as one could wish to see. To the south-east a large open space appeared, and I have since learnt that a chain of lakes runs away here, being the proper way to Fort Fraser, but as I always follow my Indian guides implicitly, I did so on this occasion. The third day the weather was fine but the trail not so good; it ran along the side of a mountain, but below the trail was good and grass abundant. My Indians started after a goat up the mountain, but were quickly driven back by three bears. The fourth day we crossed what is called the Rocky Pass, which may be avoided by keeping the bottom. To the north a chain of mountains were seen covered with snow, distant about 30 miles, where the Hudson Bay Company have a post called Bears' Fort; to the south is the Indian village Kispyaths; along the bottom runs the Skeena past the village of Allagasomeda, and farther up the village of Kithathratts on the same river.

On the fifth day we encountered some dangerous-looking Indians, but got away from them. We passed through a fine country with cotton-trees and good soil.

We now arrived at the village of Naas Glee, where the Skeena River rises. We were again on the river which we had left five days ago, having travelled 55 miles, when we might have come by the river. We had great difficulty with the Indians here, and it was fortunate that I knew the name of the chief, as otherwise they would have seized all our property; as it was, they surrounded us and were most importunate; one wanted my coat, another my gun, a third took my cap from my head, and I really thought that they would murder us. These Indians are the worst I have seen in all my travels. Naas Glee is a great fishing-station, and all the worst characters congregate there to lead an indolent life. Thousands of salmon were being dried at this village.

We hardly knew what to do, as they told us that it was ten days to Fort Fraser, and if we returned they would have robbed us of everything. I therefore determined to go on, if the Chief Norra would accompany me, and on giving him some presents he consented to do so. The river from Naas Glee downwards is very rapid, but as the banks are low and flat, a waggon-road or railroad could easily be made.

The land around Naas-Glee is excellent, and wild hay and long grass abounds. Potatoes are not grown here, owing to the thieving of the Indians. There is no heavy pine-timber hereabouts, and the canoes are made of cotton-wood.

Above Naas-Glee the river was very rapid, and it required all our energy to get along, as we had but a small quantity of dried salmon to last us ten days. Ten miles above Naas-Glee is an old Indian village, called Whatatt; here the shoal-water ends, and we enter the Babine Lake. Going through a fine country, we accomplished 20 miles this day, the lake being broad and deep. Next morning to my surprise I found a canoe at our camp, with Frenchmen and Indians, in charge of Mr. Savin Hamilton, an officer in the service of the Hudson Bay Company from Fort St. James, Stuart Lake, New Caledonia, whither we were bound. He was on his way to Naas-Glee to purchase fish, and advised me to return with him to Naas-Glee, and then to accompany him to Stuart Lake, but as I had seen enough of Naas-Glee I declined his offer,

with thanks. Mr. Hamilton expressed his surprise that we had managed to get away from Naas-Glee, as we were the first white men who had come through this route; and even he found much difficulty with the Indians there. Having persuaded Narra, the chief, to let us have his canoe, we bid farewell to Mr. Hamilton, and proceeded on our journey.

It was fortunate that we sent back our two Indians, as otherwise we should have suffered from want of food, and as it was, we reached Stuart Lake only with great difficulty. We made a fine run to day before a fair wind to Fort Killamoures, which post is only kept up in the winter. Our course from Naas-Glee to this place was south-east, and the distance about 50 miles. The land is good the whole way, with long grass on the benches near the fort, which is a very lonely place. It is a great pity to see this beautiful country so well adapted to the wants of man, lying waste, when so many Englishmen and Scotchmen would be glad to come here and till the soil. Babine Lake is deep, and in some places 5 or 6 miles wide, with islands and points of land to afford shelter from storms; from Fort Killamoures to the head of Babine is about 40 miles, direction south-south-east. From the head down about 20 miles, it runs east and west. We arrived at the head of Babine on the seventh day after leaving Naas-Glee: we had seen no Indians nor snow, and had made a favourable journey.

The district we had passed was well adapted for farming; some of the land is rocky, but on the whole it is a fine country.

At the head of Babine Lake there is a good site for a town, and a harbour could be made, as a stream flows in which would supply the town with water. This is what I call the head-water of the Skeena River; the lake is navigable for steamers and 100 miles in length.

From this to Stuart Lake there is a portage over a good trail, through the finest grove of cotton-wood I have ever seen; the ground was thickly strewn with yellow leaves, giving the scene quite an autumnal appearance, and presenting a picture far different to what we expected in this part of British Columbia.

Six miles from Babine, we came to a small lake where were some Indians fishing here: on our approach they appeared undecided whether to run or remain. I asked them for some food, and they soon provided us with some fish which refreshed us much, and having paid for our repast, we started again. From this a small stream runs a distance of 4 miles to Stuart Lake.

Arrived at Stuart Lake we found no means of crossing, no Indians to direct us, and no food to sustain us, nor had we any shot to enable us to kill ducks. We camped here three nights without food, sleeping the greater part of the time to stifle our hunger. The only thing that supported us was the great idea of the enterprise in which we were engaged, having been the first to explore the route from the Pacific to Fraser River.

One of our party found an old canoe split to pieces; this was rigged on a raft of logs, as well as circumstances would admit.

I returned to the Indians above mentioned and purchased a few herrings, and walked back to our camp with difficulty and found my limbs giving way. Next morning we started on our frail raft, expecting every moment to go down; we were obliged to sit perfectly still, as the least movement would have upset us; a slight breeze sprung up and a small sea washed over us and we had to run for a lee-shore, where kind Providence sent an Indian to succour us. He welcomed us with a "Bonjour," invited us to his lodge and gave us most excellent salmon-trout from the lake. We had at last reached this spot with thankful hearts for our preservation through so many dangers. We stayed a night with this good Indian, and next day gave him a blanket to take us to the Fort. We abandoned our old canoe without regret, and proceeded towards our destination. The Indians all along this were very kind to us. About

half-way across Stuart Lake we obtained a small prospect of gold. On the north side of the lake for about 20 miles the ground is rocky, but south toward the Fort the land is good and will produce anything.

We reached Fort St. James on the 9th October, and were received by Mr. Peter Ogden with that kindness and hospitality which I have always found at the Hudson Bay Company's ports.

The Fort is very much exposed to all winds, and I found it colder than anywhere on the journey.

Stuart Lake is 50 miles long. The portage to Babine 10 miles; Babine Lake 100 miles; from Naas-Glee to Fort Simpson 250 miles, and 200 miles from Fort Simpson to Gold Harbour, Queen Charlotte Islands.

The names of the two men who accompanied me were William Manning an Englishman, and Frank Choteau a French Canadian. It is possible that I shall prospect the Fraser a little farther this fall.

Extract from the 'Pioneer' and 'Democrat.'

From the 'Dalles Journal,' October 24. New and Rich Gold discoveries on the Si-mil-ka-meen River.

AN Expressman named McGuire, arrived at the Dalles in the early part of the week from Captain Archer's command, reports the discovery on the Si-mil-ka-meen River, about 5 miles from the camp. According to our informant, the discovery is confined to a small bar on the river, which is being worked by soldiers, Quartermaster's men, and a large number of Indians. The men from camp go down after breakfast, walking a distance of 5 miles, and working not more than half a day, average about 20 dollars to the hands. This is without the ordinary conveniences for mining, and with nothing but picks, using frying-pans for washing out. With "rockers" it is estimated that from 50 to 200 dollars to the hands could readily be taken out. We have not learned that any of the neighbouring bars have been prospected, but it can scarcely be possible that the rich deposits are confined to one locality, and when a thorough examination is had, it is more than likely that rich strikes will be made all along the course of the river. McGuire, who is represented to us as an entirely reliable man, says that he himself visited the diggings and saw the miners at work, taking out gold at a rate fully equal to that stated. It is represented that the officers in command are very anxious to conceal all knowledge of the discovery, they apprehending an immediate rush that in the present condition of the country must be attended with great privations. The nearest point at which supplies necessary to the miner can be obtained is at Colville, which is over 100 miles distant from the newly-discovered mines. The Indians, too, are represented to be decidedly hostile, and inasmuch as the troops are about to remove, miners would be exposed to constant attacks from savage foes. We mention these facts as a caution against a wild and headlong rush; but should the mines prove half as rich as represented, not all these dangers twice over would serve to check the crowd of gold-hunters that from all quarters will hie to the new El Dorado. The Expressman who brings the news says that he has been all through the California mining districts, but nowhere has he seen dirt that prospected so well as that at the Si-mil-ka-meen gold-mines. The discovery, we are told, was made by Sergeant Compton, in whose honour the locality has been named "Compton Bar."

The effect of this news has been to create quite an excitement in our town, but as yet we hear of no departures for the new gold-mines. Should the next advices confirm these startling reports, we may expect to witness a stampede scarcely equalled by that to Fraser River.

Since writing the above we have been permitted to make the following extracts from letters received at this place from officers of the army attached to the boundary survey.

Although the discoveries made are to a limited extent, yet they prove what we have heretofore asserted as our belief in the existence of gold in that part of Washington Territory, and the Upper Columbia, to be correct. It is now, however, too late to prosecute the investigation this season, but we do not entertain a single doubt that during the next spring and summer developments

will be made which will establish the fact of that part of the country being—as we have always believed it was—equal, in mineral wealth, to any part of California or Mexico.

Extracts from Letters.

“ Camp, Si-mil-ka-meen, October 8, 1859.

“ * * * I am detached with 14 men at the N. W. B. station on the Si-mil-ka-meen, about 12 miles from its mouth. * * On the 6th my sergeant showed me the result of six pans which he washed, and we found it to be worth 6 dollars. On the 7th two men obtained 20 dollars each; others from 5 to 15 dollars. We have no tools or conveniences, and the men knew but little about digging gold. I give you the simple facts, and shall make no comments. * * * It is much coarser gold than they found on Fraser River, some pieces weighing 2·50 dollars.

“ This river is very incorrectly mapped, as it is 150 miles long with numberless tributaries. It is a swollen mountain-torrent till the middle of July, so that it is late before it can be worked. It is my opinion that this gold was washed out of the hills contiguous, this year, as these diggings thus far have been on the *surface only*. You know that gold will always, if you give it time, find its way to the bed rock. I do not know that they will be developed soon as we shall leave here in ten or twelve days, and it will not be safe for a small party to attempt to mine. These Indians want a severe thrashing, and then the country can be travelled with safety. Our command has kept them civil, otherwise there would have been the devil to pay as usual.”

“ Camp Osoyoos, W. T., October 10, 1859.

“ * * * As many gold-fevered letters were doubtless despatched by the regular mail, it may be important to the exciteable population of your city to have correct accounts from the diggings. It is true that a rich placer, yielding from 10 to 30 dollars a day to the hands, has been discovered, 10 miles above the forks; but the gold is confined to a single locality, the extent of which is not more than 25 by 10 yards.

“ White, whom I sent out to prospect the stream for 4 or 5 miles above and below the placer, has failed to find it in remunerative quantities at any other point. It seems to be the opinion of experienced California miners that, rich as the placer is, it will be worked out in less than two weeks, and that there is no more gold on the river worth mining.

“ I mention all this in order to prevent men who may have heard exaggerated accounts from coming this fall. Possibly next spring or summer, miners might come and discover something better, but to come from the Dallas now would end in nothing but suffering and disappointment.

“ I was always confident that gold existed in the mountains of this territory, and expected a discovery by some one of the many expeditions which went out last spring.”

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